

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 HA-05 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 PM-05
NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 MCT-01 /094 W
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R 310557Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 607

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 0113

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PDEV, DJ

SUBJ: REPORTS OF TORTURE IN DJIBOUTI

REF: A. STATE 12207, B. DJIBOUTI 0079, C. CAIRO 1280

1. SUMMARY: POLITICAL IMMATURITY, LACK OF EFFECTIVE LEGAL INSTITUTION
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AND TRADITIONAL ETHNIC HOSTILITY COMBINED TO CREATE A SITUATION
FOLLOWING THE MID-DEC TERRORIST ATTACK IN DJIBOUTI IN WHICH THE
USE OF TORTURE MAY HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED. THIS INFO CAME TO THE
EMBASSY FIRST IN THE FORM OF RUMORS AND THEN AS DIRECT CHARGES BROUGHT

BY FAMILIES AND POLITICAL ASSOCIATES OF THE DETAINEES. THERE IS
EVIDENCE THAT THE GOVT IS CONCERNED THAT A DANGEROUS FRONTIER
HAS BEEN CROSSED AND THAT AMENDS ARE BEING MADE. CERTAIN FOREIGN
EMBASSIES, INCLUDING THIS ONE, ARE ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE THE
GOVT NOT TO PERMIT SUCH INSTANCES TO TAKE PLACE AGAIN. END SUMMARY.
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2. THIS EMBASSY HAS FREQUENTLY LAMENTED THE WEAKNESS OF DJIBOUTI
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE LACK OF FIRMNESS DEMONSTRATED BY ITS
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. FOLLOWING THE TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE PALMIER
EN ZINC RESTAURANT ON 15 DEC, WHICH LED TO THE DEATHS OF EIGHT
PEOPLE, THE GOVT OF DJIBOUTI REACTED WITH UNCHARACTERISTIC
SPEED TO PRESERVE ITS POLITICAL STABILITY AND TO REASSURE THE

SUBSTANTIAL FRENCH COMMUNITY THAT ITS SECURITY WAS NOT IN DANGER. IT IS NOW APPARENT THAT THE TERRORIST ATTEMPT, WHOEVER WAS RESPONSIBLE, WAS APPARENTLY USED AS A PRETEXT BY CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE GOVT AND ADMINISTRATION TO EMPLOY ARBITRARY SEARCH, SEIZURE AND ARREST, BEATINGS AND TORTURE AGAINST PEOPLE BELIEVED UNFAVORABLE TO THE REGIME. ACCORDING TO INFO VERY RECENTLY RECEIVED, TWO VICTIMS OF THESE ACTIONS MAY HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF THEIR TREATMENT. AS NOTED IN REFTEL B, SEVERAL OF THE DETAINEES HAVE NOT BEEN AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES SINCE THEIR ARREST. THEIR FAMILIES MAINTAIN THAT THIS IS BECAUSE THEY WERE SO BADLY BEATEN THAT THE GOVT IS EITHER ASHAMED OR AFRAID TO LET THEM BE VIEWED. THE EMBASSY WAS INFORMED BY A EUROPEAN VISITOR TO THE HOSPITAL IN DJIBOUTI IN LATE DECEMBER OF HAVING SEEN MANACLED PATIENTS WITH HEAVY INJURIES TO HEAD AND BODY. THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR HAS STATED PRIVATELY THAT THE PRISONERS ARE IN GOOD CONDITION.

3. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE DJIBOUTI GOVT ADMINISTRATION HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THEIR POLITICAL AND/OR FAMILY TIES TO THE PRESIDENT TO EMPLOY HARSH MEASURES AGAINST OUTSIDERS. IT APPEARS THAT ONE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS, DJIBOUTI DEP. IDRIS OMAR GUELE, A COUSIN OR NEPHEW OF THE PRESIDENT, HAS ESTABLISHED A KIND OF PRESIDENTIAL GOON SQUAD THAT HAS BEEN EMPLOYED AGAINST INFILTRATORS FROM SOMALIA AS WELL AS NATIVE DJIBOUTIANS OF BOTH AFAR AND ISSA ETHNIC BACKGROUND. AT LEAST ONE POLITICAL OPPONENT, AHMED DINI, FORMER P.M.,
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TOLD EMBASSY (SEPTTEL CONVERSATION) THAT THIS QUOTE PARALLEL SERVICE UNQUOTE HAS KILLED CERTAIN PEOPLE AND BURIED THEIR BODIES IN THE DESERT. BECAUSE THIS UNIT HAS NOT BEEN USED AGAINST ANY WELL-KNOWN POLITICAL DISSIDENTS OR KNOWN PERSONALITIES, IT IS FRANKLY DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THE MOTIVATION FOR SUCH AN ENTERPRISE OTHER THAN SOME VAGUE CONCERN FOR PRESIDENTIAL SAFETY.

4. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THE GOVT IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY THE EXCESSES EMPLOYED DURING THE POST-TERRORIST ROUNDUP. THE PRESIDENT NEVER CEASES TO ASSURE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS THAT THE VARIOUS ACCUSED PARTICIPANTS IN THE PALMIE
R
EN ZINC DISASTER WILL BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE. BECAUSE THE JUDGES AND PROSECUTORS IN SUCH A TRIAL WILL BE ALL OR NEARLY ALL FRENCH, THERE IS THE IMPLICATION THAT STANDARD WESTERN NOTIONS OF JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL IN SUCH COURT PROCESSES. THE ACCUSED WILL HAVE THE BENEFIT OF ATTORNEYS, WHO, IN FACT, WILL ALSO BE FRENCH, ACCORDING TO AFAR LEADERS. BECAUSE MUCH OF THE LATENT ANTAGONISMS STIRRED UP BY THE POST-TERRORIST POLICE ROUNDUP WERE TRADITIONAL ANTAGONISMS BETWEEN AFARS AND ISSAS (WHO HAVE BEEN COMPETING FOR PASTURES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED YEARS), IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT SOME OF THE AMENDS BEING MADE ARE OF A TRADITIONAL KIND.

FOLLOWING THE ALLEGED DEATH OF TWO PRISONERS IN LATE DECEMBER, MINISTER OF INTERIOR MOUMIN BAHDON MADE A HELICOPTER TRIP TO AFAR COUNTRY TO CONTACT THE FAMILIES OF THE DECEASED TO ARRANGE FOR COMPENSATION FOR THE DEATHS. ALTHOUGH THE DETAILS OF THIS BLOODPRICE ARRANGEMENT ARE NOT KNOWN TO US, KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS STATE THAT THE FAMILIES ACCEPTED THIS SOLUTION TO THE INCIDENTS.

5. IF IS NOT TOO LATE, PERHAPS, TO WORK TO PREVENT THE APPARENT DEGRADATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND VALUES IN DJIBOUTI. THE CHARGE IN HIS FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE FONMIN HAS RAISED THE MATTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS. ALTHOUGH THE FONMIN IS QUITE EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED IN THE PROBLEM OF RESTORING ETHNIC BALANCE TO THE GOVT (HE IS ONE OF TWO AFARS LEFT IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVT), HE TOLD THE CHARGE THAT HE BELIEVES THAT FIRMNESS ON THE PART OF DONOR STATES (PARTICULARLY THE FRENCH WHO PROVIDE THE ENTIRE POLICE AND ARMY BUDGET), WOULD RESULT IN SWAYING THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ASSOCIATES FROM ADOPTING ON A PERMANENT BASIS THE USE OF POLICE AUTHORITY TO MAINTAIN THEMSELVES IN POWER. THE CHARGE HAS RAISED THE MATTER OBLIQUELY IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PRESIDENT. FOLLOWING SEVERAL COMMENTS BY THE CHARGE WITH THE EGYPTIAN AMB ON THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN DJIBOUTI, THE EGYPTIAN ASKED THE PRESIDENT ON 30 JAN ABOUT THE REPORTED DEATHS IN PRISON WHICH HE VIGOROUSLY DENIED.

6. THE POSITION OF THE U.S. ON HUMAN RIGHTS IS WELL KNOWN TO DJIBOUTI'S TOP LEADERSHIP. WE HAVE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS BEEN REQUIRED TO REMONSTRATE TO THE LOCAL LABOR OFFICE, POLICE AND FONMINISTRY OFFICIALS BECAUSE OF A TENDENCY TO REJECT WORKING PAPER APPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGNERS, ESPECIALLY ETHIOPIANS (WE HAVE EMPLOYED A FEW REFUGEES AS WELL AS ONE TCN FORMERLY IN ASMARA). COPIES OF THE PRESIDENT'S DEC 15 SPEECH ON HUMAN RIGHTS WAS PREPARED FOR INCLUSION IN A DIP NOTE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO UNDERLINE OUR CONCERN TO LOCAL LEADERS, NOTING DJIBOUTI'S INTEREST AS A NEW STATE IN DEVELOPING STRUCTURES TO GUARANTEE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.
CLARKE

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